

**Unit of Study: Poetry, Primary**  
**Content Overview**  
**Lisa Harris**

**Unit Length: 6 weeks**

**Introduction:** In this unit of study, students will learn to use a variety of poetic devices in their writing.

**Mentor Texts List:**

Water Dance by Thomas Locker

Peacocks and Other Poems by Valerie Worth

Loose Leashes by Amy Schmidt

Stone Bench in an Empty Park by Paul Janeczko

Rejoice: Poetry Celebrating Life in the Amazon Rainforest  
(written by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students) Scholastic

**Week by Week Overview:**

Week 1: Immerse students in poetry (see MT list above)

Mentor Text: Water Dance by Thomas Locker

Week 2: Poetic Device: Simile

Mentor Text: Predictable by Bruce Lansky and Friends

Week 3: Poetic Device: Metaphor

Mentor Text: By Myself

Week 4: Poetic Device: Personification

Mentor Text: Flying into New York

Week 5: Poetic Device: Onomatopoeia

Mentor Text: Rejoice

Week 6: Poetic Device: Alliteration

Mentor Text: Dusty, Nosy and Tongue Twisters

Extension: Native American Poetry Activity

## **Unit of Study: Poetry, Primary**

### **Lisa Harris**

#### **Week 1: Immersion**

I began this unit by immersing students in poetry (see Mentor Text List in Content Overview). I read to them, students read poems, students performed poems, and students created visual art projects inspired by poems. I used Water Dance (page 1) for a whole class mentor text activity. I shared and read the text to students, they read it to each other, picked their favorite stanza and dramatized it. For each poetic device I used two to three days of Writer's Workshop time.

#### **Week 2: Simile**

- ◆ We began by studying 3 student poems which used simile: Predictable, Friends, and Untitled (page 2). We discussed the meanings of each and discovered the use of the words 'like' and 'as' as part of the pattern of similes.
- ◆ We then drew pictures of ourselves and wrote descriptive words about ourselves around the picture. We described ourselves physically and emotionally.
- ◆ We wrote similes using ourselves: I am as tall as... I'm as smart as... I'm loud like a..., etc.
- ◆ This concluded our introduction to simile. We didn't write an entire poem using simile, we just practiced.

#### **Week 3: Metaphor**

- ◆ We began by really studying the poem "By Myself" (page 3). First we discussed what each line could mean and the fact that the same line could mean different things to different people. The students then spent time noticing the craft used in the poem—the absence of 'like' and 'as' and the way 'I'm' is repeated throughout the poem.
- ◆ After the careful mentor text study, we used the same picture of ourselves with the describing words to create our own metaphoric poems. We borrowed the beginning and ending words used in the poem "By Myself" and inserted our own metaphors. (See student example, page 4)
- ◆ When we finished our poems we shared in pairs.

#### **Week 4: Personification**

- ◆ We started with a study of the poem, Flying into New York (page 5). We discussed it and drew a picture to show its meaning.
- ◆ Next we listed actions (verbs) people do on the board. We discussed how certain machines and inanimate objects can make noises similar to actions people do. We tried to stay away from personifying animals and geared the lesson more towards machines for example: television talking, fog hiding objects, wind whistling, a tractor groaning, etc.
- ◆ Last the students tried their hand at writing examples using personification in phrases. We didn't write complete poems here either.

### **Week 5: Onomatopoeia**

- ◆ The mentor text used for this device is Rejoice: Poetry Celebrating Life in the Amazon Rainforest written by third graders. Onomatopoeia is a device or craft the students are quite familiar with as many picture book authors use it liberally in their work. We did study the poems, but only briefly.
- ◆ For this study the students started with a picture of something that makes a distinctive noise: TV, helicopter, motorcycle, etc. Then they tried their hand at writing their own poems carefully inserting the 'sound effects' words somewhere inside the poem. (See student example, page 6) The challenge here for students was how to begin and end their poems. Many students looked back at the rainforest poems to get their ideas for this part.

### **Week 6: Alliteration**

- ◆ The mentor text for this study used was, Dusty, Nosy (page 5) and many famous tongue twisters such as 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers' and others.
- ◆ We had read many fiction stories about pigs so we decided to make pigs our central theme for these poems. First we brainstormed both describing words and action words that started with "P." We wrote a few alliterative phrases using these words together.
- ◆ Then the students wrote their own piggy alliteration poems and illustrated them. (See student example, page 7)

### **Culminating Project: Native American Poetry**

We discussed how many Native Americans were named after animals in nature according to which attributes the person had. The students chose an animal that best exemplified their personality. They drew a picture of this animal and wrote describing and action words to match it. Students circled words that matched their personality and abilities. They then wrote "I" statements about themselves: I run fast, I climb quickly, I am playful. Then, to make the statements sound more poetic we had the students take away the "I's" and presto... you have a poem. (See student example in 3 step, pages 8,9,10)

Runs very fast  
Eats all day long  
Likes to play with others in the grass  
Jumps very high over fences  
Roars when angry  
Grows big and strong  
Bites and chews slowly

This last part of the process is quite challenging and took one-on-one conferencing with each student to achieve. I had trained parents and I finish it in two days. The students drew a self-portrait with their third grade buddies to match the poem. I saw many different devices being utilized by the students which had been previously taught. Best of all, students were choosing to read and write poetry on their own.

# Water Dance by Thomas Locker

1

SOME PEOPLE SAY that I am one thing.  
Others say that I am many.  
Ever since the world began  
I have been moving in an endless circle.  
Sometimes I fall from the sky.

*I am the rain.*

Sometimes I cascade.  
I tumble  
down,  
down,  
over the moss-covered rocks,  
through the forest shadows.

*I am the mountain stream.*

At the foot of the mountains,  
I leap from a stone cliff.  
Spiraling.  
Plunging.

*I am the waterfall.*

In the shadows of the mountain,  
I am still and deep.  
I fill  
and overflow.

*I am the lake.*

I wind through broad, golden valleys  
joined by streams,  
joined by creeks.  
I grow ever wider,  
broader and deeper.

*I am the river.*

I pass through a gateway  
of high stone palisades,  
leaving the land behind.  
Cool silver moonlight  
sparkles and dances  
on my waves.

*I am the sea.*

Drawn upward  
by warm sunlight,  
in white-silver veils  
I rise into the air.  
I disappear.

*I am the mist.*

In thousands of shapes I reappear  
high above the earth in the blue sky.  
I float.  
I drift.

*I am the clouds.*

(These are some poems from a teacher blog called “A Year of Reading.”  
What follows are some examples of student poems using simile.

#### FRIENDS

A friend is like a mystery  
still to be discovered  
wanting to be figured out

A friend is like a book  
always very clever  
waiting to be read

(untitled)

A hand is like an open basket  
    waiting for you to put things in  
A foot is like a walking racket  
    stomp, step, skip, jump in.  
A nose is like a high up mound  
    that you can climb and then slide down  
A mouth is like a funny clown  
    which makes us laugh and never frown  
Your eyes are like a fire  
    burning with desire  
Your mind is like a climbing wire  
    with every reach you go higher

Predictable

Poor as a church mouse.  
strong as an ox,  
cute as a button,  
smart as a fox.

thin as a toothpick,  
white as a ghost,  
fit as a fiddle,  
dumb as a post.

bald as an eagle,  
neat as a pin,  
proud as a peacock,  
ugly as sin.

When people are talking  
you know what they'll say  
as soon as they start to  
use a cliché.

by Bruce Lansky

**By Myself**

When I'm by myself  
And I close my eyes  
I'm a twin  
I'm a dimple in a chin  
I'm a room full of toys  
I'm a squeaky noise  
I'm a gospel song  
I'm a gong  
I'm a leaf turning red  
I'm a loaf of brown bread  
I'm whatever I want to be  
And anything I care to be  
And when I open my eyes  
What I care to be  
Is me.

*Eloise Greenfield*

# Wut em I?

When I'm by my self  
And I close my eyes  
I'm a pest riting wars  
I'm a swim pool flav wtr  
I'm a tre ful uv leevs  
And when I open my  
eyes what I care to be  
Is me.

by Elizabeth

## FLYING INTO NEW YORK

Clouds are busy  
hiding the city,  
the water,

piling up,  
rushing along in  
a pack,

bunching together  
over summer at  
Rockaway Beach.

## DUSTY, NOSY

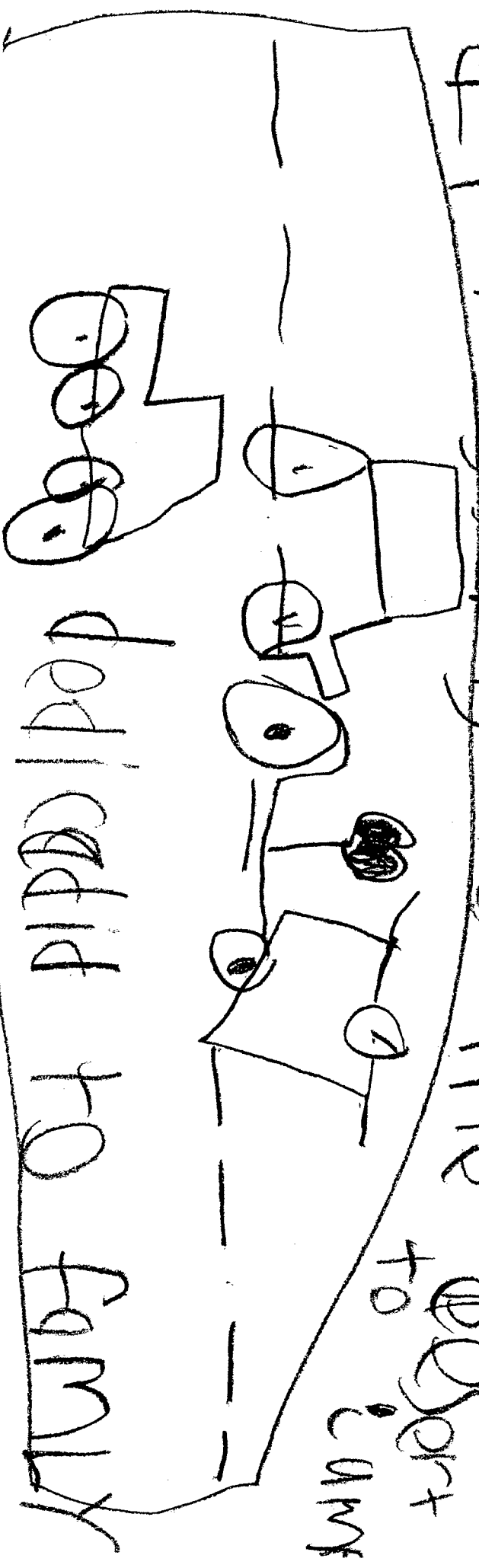
A shaft of sunlight  
Dancing with dust.

Sniff it.  
Sharp.  
Scratchy.  
Sneezy.



A motor Sico  
on the street  
Vroom Vroom

IM ST Arthing  
up Vroom Vroom  
I'm going to the desert



by Channing

7



Peter Pig Pounced on a  
Pancake in The  
Park.



Thirsty

Speedy

horse 8

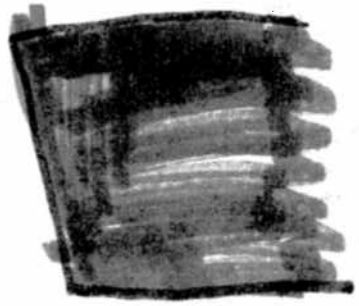
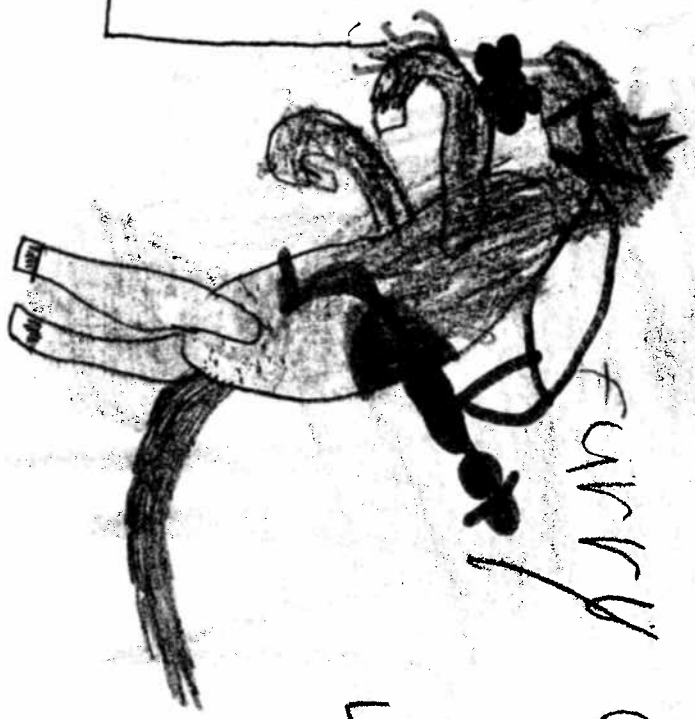
fast + water  
trot or gallop  
Tall

whinies  
nights

carry  
climb

Lives in a

Pit



I run very fast.

9

I gallop across the plains.

I high when danger is approaching.

I become a bronko.

I leap over fences high and low.

I am very playful.

I tug heavy crates and boxes.

I eat grains and oats.

## Fast App 1005a

Running fast around the pasture.

Bucking and kicking when danger is near.

Loves leaping over fences.

Gives bumpy rides.

Loves rolling in the mud.

Now she'll take a bath.